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# The Courant



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# The Courant Editors

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*This issue of The Courant is dedicated to Bruce Smith.*

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## Preface

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Teaching everywhere from penitentiary to preparatory school for over twenty-five years, Bruce Smith has been everyone's patient reader. How many students of writing have waited on his stamps and pregnant arrows, his exclamatory marginalia? How many students have spoken of him as "Bruce" in proprietary tones, the name an assurance and contract in the unspoken tribe of students who want to proclaim themselves writers and re-imagine themselves read by the ideal reader who will know them truly and fairly.

Bruce reads the diffident, the declamatory, the conscientious, and the conflicted. He reads the minimalist who is at a loss for words and the messiah who cannot find a rock in a gravel pit. The Confession, the Threat, the Contract and the Breach, the Misunderstanding and the Communion float across the dinette table on 11 Watson Avenue. He's read the work of enemies and lovers, strangers and criminals, poets and jerks. How many puzzles, advertisements, programs and and slim jokes has he read?

We as writers apologize to him, second-guess him, challenge him and bore him to tears. We've probably attempted to amaze him blessed too many times. And he seems to have a stamp of approval for all of it. Is he St. Bruce of the pelican arrow? Bruce has grappled many of us to his heart. And there he adheres to his discipline a song as rich as "Sea of Love" swooning through a daily

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schedule. Not despite but because of this isle full of noises, Bruce informs our time with the “particular accidents gone by” in his life and the life of a country.

In “Prospero in Milan,” the closing poem in *Mercy Seat*, Bruce writes: “Out of my light I made song and pageant——silver and blue things pleasing. I served no master, yet I was mastered.” His poetry demonstrates that vulnerability is a kind of mastery as well. In Silver and Information, he writes:

The world is fluent grief, the woman in me  
thinks for all of us, for the mob in the heart:  
Orpheus, Absolute Dog, the Woolgatherer,  
the Sheep, Virgin Father, Son.

“The Woman in Me”  
in *Silver And Information*

Certainly we must read him with the same generosity with which he turns our efforts to late afternoon light in those picture windows on Watson. I am not talking about the generosity of the pen; rather, his is the generosity of the heart. Surely we know from the conversation he invites in all of us who have sent something boldly or timidly his way that he knows the difference between what he sees before him on the page and the imagined selves we promise to breath into life every time we bend our profane will to prayerful hands.

So this volume of The Courant is for the writing instructor who says the truth in the mildest words he

knows, who mends our shattered towns. These fine poems and stories are for the “Buddhist/whose steps are careful to avoid killing/ things” (“Apology” in *The Common Wages* ), who can write incandescently, who can make words into jazz, who brings his father to sweetness and light, who wrote

As if it were a crime for a man's body  
to have weight. As if it were a crime  
for the weight to be lifted up  
and laid gently down.

“When I Take Up Weight”  
in *The Common Wages*

This is for the reader who writes Phil Levine and Hayden Carruth, Emily Dickinson and Galway Kinnell, but also Garnett Mims and Ornette Coleman into his language, who wrote “The sign we make for *mill running* /is a fist as piston cranking the elbow/in small circles, like one-armed shadow boxing” (“Mill Running, 1901” in *The Common Wages* ) and also wrote

If I had an eye wide enough  
I could be both scientist  
and evangelist. I could be  
a witness to myself.  
If I were stormed  
with the same political furor  
as that grainy bottom of the sea  
then I could confuse Armageddon

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with the wake of the heart.  
And when I open my mouth,  
which bitterness is in the wind,  
which salt's my own?

"What The Sea Feeds Us"  
in *Silver And Information*

What island am I? Bruce asks in "Mercy," and his poetry answers a multitude: an urgent pressing of language that sometimes reads like magical incantation...out of, out of, out of, just as, just as, I saw, I saw, whatever death, whatever cultures, whatever geography, "whatever drudgery and destiny were left in the wheat" ("The Sandwiches" in *Mercy Seat*). He adds to the raft, the raft an end in itself and therefore good.

We dedicate this volume to the poet of letters to friends and protest fire-forged in the blue-fluid crucible of his own name. We recognize his wonder at the resonance between the public and private self, the confluence of yearnings neighborly and national. "There is a story so true, so becoming, so full of duty/and engraved love that it's glass," Bruce once said in "Window" (*The Common Wages*) and he's still telling stories years later. His self-portraits are always about someone, somewhere, or something else. (Perhaps he's learned that neat trick from reading the rest of us.) So also we name our prize for that effort that puts forth the imagined self. We look for the young writers who have read deeply into other's lives and begin to know even at this age that learning who we are is the paradox of the self found in countless others.



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*From the brush* his name comes, panic grass and nightshade  
and the fruitless, flowerless, stinking ginkgoes—his trees  
of dream and menace. And his last name, *Smith* —  
a past to hammer away at, a flower to hammer with.

“Changeling”  
in *Mercy Seat*

This year’s winners of the Smitty Prize are Hannah Sharpless for her poem “garden pea,” (Vol. I, No. 3), Amos Barclay for his poem “Pearl,” (Vol. II, No. 1), and in this issue (Vol. II, No. 2), Heath Cabot for her poem “Photons.” All three poets are represented in this issue. They each win a \$20 gift certificate at the Andover Bookstore.

*Craig Thorn IV*

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Poetry by Bruce Smith is from:

*The Common Wages* (New York: The Sheep Meadow Press, 1983.)

*Silver and Information* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1985.)

*Mercy Seat* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994.)

All three books are available at the Andover Bookstore.  
Winners take note.

## Bacchanal

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i snap like a stick of firewood snaps  
as it bends over a knee— stubbornly.  
you stamp sheets of reddened darkness on my  
eyelids

yet

i love you.

the root of my tongue snags these words  
which stretch my cheeks taut,  
taunting me, like blood.

your faces ripple

like reflections on the ocean

quivering beneath the pier,

flaming impressions on the black water,  
which i bent over in the summertime,

tenderly, as if i would kiss it,

my senses savoring the salt,

the sharp, puncturing, sodium-laced air  
seething quietly above the sea,

seeping into my skin—

a thousand needle pricks.

once, when i was young,

i was sick;

my fever peaked at 104° F,

and i needed an IV.

i love you like i love the needle

as it sank into my arm,

my wrist strapped stiffly

against a hard scrap of lumber.

my veins, numb and blue.

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my skin, a dry film— saran wrap.  
you're tearing me,  
like i tear that fragile skin at those rare times,  
when i'm alone and the silence surprises me  
because it's *abominable*,  
and there's no one to talk to,  
(except GOD— but he doesn't exist,  
because i have no FAITH)  
and i'm ashamed that i fondle  
the cross around my neck—  
but GOD, *I love you!*  
(why do i cry HIS name?)  
this love is like a mouth, tender with wine,  
a tongue sliding into the chasms  
that dive between my cells.  
it's like pricking on my earlobes— HOT!  
stagnant, itching, burning,  
rust-colored like an infection.  
it makes me cough;  
it spears holes in my lungs  
like menthols are supposed to do.  
this love is like your plaintive ass—  
CONCAVE.  
like your philosophical frustrations,  
it's petty as hell.  
it is the nausea that swims  
from my naval to my chest,  
seeps into my bloodstream,  
then trickles down into my core,  
like gravity trickles inward  
towards the center of the earth.  
it's like BACCHUS

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who they say  
turned men into dolphins.  
he panicked them and they leapt,  
beast-ridden,  
overboard,  
cast themselves from the ship  
as it dripped with vines,  
its sails luffing,  
purple with sunset  
and wine.  
their fins got tangled in the salt marsh.  
its long grassy arms reeled them in,  
embraced them,  
catching their heads below the water,  
so that they couldn't raise their noses  
to the surface.  
yet the sun shaved the moisture from  
their long gray backs,  
which shriveled into flame  
above the muddy water.  
their skeletons hung  
like a lost cargo of porcelain  
among the reeds.

*Heath Cabot*

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# Photons

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My mind often twitches,  
stretches tight like a bow, at the idea that we  
are all self-created,

that we all  
metamorphosed from slick space  
into touchable things, that throb  
at the tips of fingers

through some want *of our own*.

Creation, sometimes it appears as intricate  
as the patterns etched into  
the surfaces of leaves—  
likenesses of trees, yet much smaller,  
with stark, winter silhouettes,  
leafless.

Creation— sometimes it feels like I felt,  
as I lay with my arms crossed over my breast,  
grinning like Ramses must have grinned  
when they first unwrapped him—  
yet with moist lips.

I couldn't tell if I was breathing,  
if my heart was pumping.

I couldn't stop myself from leaving,  
couldn't stop myself from sideslipping,

---

couldn't prevent the Void  
from drawing me into its airy lungs.

That was the only time  
I viewed my face with my own vision.

I loved the vacuum of my forehead,  
my white, rolling eyes,  
draining into the cold, coating my expression.  
The cold didn't surprise me that night.

Dying was just like it is described in books.

2.

My hand now hangs in my sight  
like a pinata,  
bleeding with colors,  
which shift upon the surface of my skin  
like armies,  
rolling heavily into my pores,  
invading my cuticles  
and my arteries.

My teacher said that my hands  
thrash about  
in purple.  
I think he also told me that purple  
is the hand of God,  
but I'm not sure,  
for after lightning struck him,  
as his black, brittle mane flapped  
in the guts of a dawning storm,

---

he told me that the light he saw  
moving like a blade over his fingers  
was the hand of God as well.

("Oh, the Lord moves in mysterious ways...")

I too see light moving.  
It's like a thousand insects  
mating  
in mid-air.  
It has the rolling motion,  
of the tops of oak trees stirring  
in the dusky, gasping wind.

If light is not Beauty  
or Truth,  
it *must* be copulation;

*It must be Creation.*

*Heath Cabot*

# Nausea

---

The world today is a cartoon.  
A black, waxy outline twists around my fingers  
into the padding, of my paws,  
around the newborn greenness of the leaves  
into the epitaphs embroidered on their linen  
surfaces.

It is a membrane, a cell wall,  
sharp as if an iron  
had blazed it into the air.  
It surrounds the world's organs,  
a thin abyss, which hasn't yet expanded  
or exploded  
to become a universe.

Sometimes, when I cease to *observe*,  
this outline drains from the vessels of my sight,  
and the world is a chalk-drawing  
on the pavement during a rainstorm.  
My fingers leak slowly from their casing  
into the soil,  
into the grass,  
into this root— this "*skin of sea lion*,"  
this "*great wrinkled paw*,"  
this *serpent*, this "*vultures talon*,"  
and I slide between the ridges of the bark  
into the slippery chasms which, bubbling,  
expand beneath this blanket— the surface of the  
World,  
which stays the contents of "Reality"

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from slipping into Nothingness.

I suppose this is the sensation,  
the Sickening,  
the emptying of my stomach  
into the current of the wailing Is,  
the tired stream of clouds  
which I dissolve,  
the Nausea—  
it descends, trickles into my hands.

It is you stretched above me— the sky,  
the nicotine frozen on your sandpaper tongue,  
the pricking pain  
seeping through my capillaries, through my skin,  
the void that filled my throat each time I in-  
haled.

Your naked face and the darkness  
swarmed about my forehead,  
a mass of blue flies,  
their bodies crumbling,  
as my own body snapped like a sheet in the wind,  
and my fingers split in the rivers of your hair.

Your eyes, they bled amulets,  
which splintered, lanced into my throat,  
slicing the slowly dissolving fortress of my flesh.  
You smiled, because the white of my arms shiv-  
ered,  
and I couldn't wrench my fingers off your face—



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but they were fusing with your cheeks, you  
know!

And would you not have shivered  
if you had Ouranos above you,  
if you conceived rivers and mountains in your  
aorta?

Your fenceless features  
seemed suspended from the ceiling,  
The furrows of your flesh flowed with fluid,  
for your pores wept.  
As I burdened your lips with blackness,  
your pupils dove between my teeth;  
waterfalls of darkness,  
they squirmed into my lungs,  
then froze  
into seas of gravel resting beneath my ribs.  
We vaporized then.  
Only the blades of your toes  
carving my calves from the floor  
gave proof that we had not erased "Reality,"  
when we twisted our lips, pinwheels,  
in the torrent of blue cells shifting through the  
window  
above your head (a lion's head),  
when we threw our stomachs out,  
like starfish do,  
into the nameless whirlpool  
of the World.

*Heath Cabot*

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All quotes from Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea*.



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## Basics for Living

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He just packed his bag one day and left. It was done without fanfare, without warning. A brief note was left on his bed for his roommate; let him try and explain it to the world. Hell, roommate had about as good an idea as anyone else; it had been one of the more frequent topics during their late night “philosophy” debates, one of the ones that usually began with something completely non-sequitur, like the time Johnny came in and started babbling about homework and his nonexistent girlfriend. And then *he* cut right in with this funny expression on his face, and said

“If you were to be anywhere, where would you be?”

The friend looked startled for a moment, and after glancing around himself, as though to look for the punchline, said:

“Right here, with my homework and the nonexistent girlfriend...”

And then paused, as if Johnny maybe regretted what he just said, but before he could renege the other just looked away, at the far corner of the room.

“Really?” he asks “you’re happy here?”

An annoyed expression crossed the other’s face, who exhales and rolls his eyes.

“Sure, why not. We’ve got food, shelter, and we’ll probably live to see tomorrow. All the basics for survival. The way I see it, Massachusetts is as good as it gets.”

“No inspiration to go elsewhere?”

“Why?” almost curious.

“Because it’s fucking there. Because there’s a whole

world for the seeing” Basically, why not? as he slips into his lingo.

“Yeah, so I’ll do that later.”

Later, he thought as he remembered the conversation. It was the word that spoiled the conversation. It meant, he knew, after high school. After college. That cross country car trip that always got planned, but will never happen until yer packed with the runts and a middle aged wife in a car that smells like carsickness and 7 up, staying at Ramada Inns - rrgh!

He choked the thoughts off with a snarl and viciously tightened the strap on his sack. He straightened and looked around. The room full of possessions ( his possessions ) once comfortably messy now seemed cramped, walls of posters closing in floor cluttered air close, and he stalked out, never looking back.

He didn’t so much as glance aside until he could see the train station. Only then did he turn around, look up the hill. He saw tree-lined streets newly swept of winter grit, and beyond them the school. He stood there, looked at his feet, the train station, and then back at his feet. And for one terrible moment he thought about the security he was leaving. Not just for now, but an education, his acceptances to college, a job. Security for the rest of his life, guaranteed. He almost headed back. He wanted to head back. He could feel one foot leaving the ground, ever so slightly, not just shifting position but about to turn, to walk. And in a panic, he found himself slamming his foot back to the ground with a vengeance, felt the shock of solid earth run up his leg. Jolted back to reality, wide-eyed with awe he vaguely thought to himself, Damn, this body really does want to go. He looked one last time back

up the street, calm and inviting, and found he couldn't move. Guess I'm fucked, he thought with a grin punctuated by a bark of laughter that startled a raven from the trees.

Walking away from the bus stop and it was raining, a drizzle that clung to the cuffs of his pants and soaked his shirt. He moved in step to a Dylan song rolling through his brain. The coat was in the sack, staying dry 'cause this was the closest thing he'd had to a shower in a week. Streetlights, widely spaced, birthed glistening reflections. He breathed deep and the air that filled his lungs was fresh and moist. He looked about, and one direction seemed as good as another so he started off down the street looking for a place for shelter. He'd stayed in motels and the like, until he found his money dropping away faster than he'd expected, even with skipping every other meal. But he still had that magic bit of plastic that could continue providing him with enough cash for ( he figured ) three more weeks of food, at least. He was set. He was still kicking around the Bible belt, but he was set. Bus had taken him past New York, and then south from Chicago. He'd started walking before then. His old friends never could understand that the only way to see a place, right and proper, was to walk it. So on a whim he got off the buses, sometimes at stops, sometimes just asking the driver to pull over. Walking cross the country wasn't so bad, and he enjoyed the solitude. Except for the one night, when it had reminded him of an old girlfriend. He remembered that phone conversation, when they had been discussing hopes and dreams and the like, and he'd mentioned his.



"I just want to go. Somewhere, anywhere, I don't know or care and it's driving me nuts staying here. I mean, don't worry 'bout it, it's not like I'm going to do anything about it ( and at this point, he remembered laughing bitterly ) "I get like this sometimes though. Just take off and see the world, solo. I saw "Thelma and Louise" the other night, and the scenery! Sheissein, Arizona's looking really good. Or Colorado maybe."

It wasn't until this point when he'd noticed that she'd gotten all quiet, and he stopped, feeling like an ass. Then, she told him, half through quiet tears how it made her feel "just a little sad" that his dream didn't include her, and when he tried to explain that it didn't include anybody, that was the point and not to take it the wrong way then she started talking about how she understood, or something, with a voice that made clear that she didn't. And he just blanked out and found himself staring at his fist wondering if maybe he shouldn't just put it through a wall like that one time, maybe just go crazy and have done with it. Something, anything, just to get her to shut up and stop trying to be so goddamn understanding and considerate. And it was then, in the midst of his frustration, with a rage that he could no longer remember how he summoned, that it first occurred to him to leave.

Early morning, he awoke and sat up in the a dingy flat that sixteen teens were squatting in. The city was Des Moines, he thought, but then again, he could be wrong. He hadn't been paying much attention to names lately. 'Cept one, he thought, gazing down at the girl still lying beside him. Head resting on one arm that had been around his shoulders, the other flung over the leg of another sleeper,

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Cinnamon slept like the dead. Or the drugged, he thought dryly, then discarded the notion. He'd been with her all night, 'til they'd fallen asleep in each others arms. And she promised that that part of her life was over. Christ, Cinnamon, he thought to himself, you've sure'n had your share of living, haven'chu. Careful not to disturb the others, he disentangled himself from the pile, and walked over to a window. Tiny Alice and Artful were already up, and hot water for instant coffee was being boiled over one of those old Coleman portable stoves. He nodded to the others, mumbled a barely good natured "morning" at them, then went up to the roof to watch the day come in. Trudging up the flights of stairs his mind drifted back to Cinnamon. Weird thing, that. One minute you're walking down the street, feeling confident in your beliefs, and the next you see some girl getting hassled by a couple drunk guys. So, the lady don't look any too pleased about it, and they're crowding her against the wall her like they've got ideas. What'chu 'sposed t'do? Walk on? They didn't look like they needed a third party, and that's what you kept telling yourself. Right up to the point where you caught yourself walking up behind them and saying "hey" in a voice that sounded louder than you thought it would, until all three of them got quiet and you thought, oh my, perhaps I made a mistake. But in the end, they turned out to be drunker than he thought, and he got to pull the Boy Scout routine of "hey, its nothing miss" that he'd wanted to do ever since he'd tried to stand up to the bully in third grade but ended up getting pummeled in front of the class. Then she found out that he hadn't the foggiest idea where he was planning to stay for the night, so she took him to an unlit concrete building, gutted by fire, and introduced him to a host of

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other people. Then, for no reason he could fathom, he fell in love with her. After about a week, he told her ( awkwardly ) that he loved her, that he was leaving, but that she was welcome to come along. He said this softly, in a whisper, and tried not to look at her. There was a brief pause, and she glanced around, rocked back on her heels and pretended to think about it. She ended up coming along.

The sun was rising over the skyline and he propped his feet up on the pitted concrete and stretched, waiting for the sun's warmth. He closed his eyes as he yawned, and heard the door to the roof open and close, somewhere behind him. Then Cinnamon sat beside him, drawing close and shifting. Tomorrow they would move again, out of this city, onto the road. He held her tight, ruffled her hair and kissed her, feeling her breathe. She let out a sleepy sigh and neither of them could see ahead two weeks so neither of them would've believed that one would be dead and together they watched the day break.

The air was arid, not so much hot anymore as dry, like the area surrounding a blast furnace. He stood in a field just off the road, summer grass long and dried brown from the heat. It looked just like where he'd woken up, and what he'd been walking past all day. Slowly turning around his only thought was: it's so flat! This didn't help matters at all, 'cause he hadn't had much to drink this day, and was dazedly trying to figure out whether maybe he was suffering from dehydration or something, but couldn't stop the mental mutter of "it's so flat. no hills. just flat. I bet I can see clear to the ocean from here." The storm



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clouds that he had seen, first on the horizon, then boiling across the prairie, were now high up far above him, ( but not nearly so high as the other clouds, no. ) Then he heard a growl, or maybe it was just thunder, and he felt static raising the tiny hairs on the back of his head. Hackles, he though distantly, and then, looking across his shoulder he thought he saw a wolf, or coyote, more likely. It's hackles were raised too, and it was pacing him. He ran towards it, and it backed off. Then he heard thunder, and knew it was not a growl. It was a sound like two mammoth slabs of stone being dropped on a slate highway from very high up, and he began to run. The coyote ran with him and together they felt the rush of cool air, blessedly cool, that preceded the rain. It rained like a god weeping for his child, like a great river shattered, like one of those pumps he saw yesterday if they should suddenly strike water instead of oil. And he realized he was running, that he was soaked, and he fell to his knees. Then he looked across at his coyote, which was sitting in front of him, tongue lolling out of a doggie grin. And the wetness of the rain hit him in the back of the skull like a murderous hammer, and his last thought before blacking out was that the rain was washing his friend away.

It wasn't until early September that he could actually call his folks. At first he didn't want to, then he was afraid to. Later on, when he was with Cinnamon he really didn't give a shit one way or the other, but after she had died and just before... he had almost. Almost broken down and done it. Now he did it cause he had to. He was out of cash, and on the other side of the country, but mostly he



just had to know. He'd seen spectacular desert sunsets, stood on a mesa talking to an old Indian about "white man's moccasins," his Chucks. But now he wanted to know if his family'd take him back. He wasn't sure why though. He knew he could take care of himself, more or less, so he had no direct need of them. All the same, he thought as he dropped his coins into the slot, dialing a number he had almost forgotten, here I am. There was a pause, and a ring, far off. It occurred to him that the combination of long distance calling and the fact that this was a pay phone might make it nearly impossible to hear -

"Hello"

"Hi, um, Dad?" ( pause ) "That you?"

There was another pause before his father spoke again. When he did speak, it was in the soft tones that one might speak to an animal with, so as not to scare it off. How are you ( fine ), where are you ( Nevada - he'd checked ), Are you ok, and so on. In the background he thought he heard his mother's voice. What followed then was a combination the third degree and family reunion, with shouting and crying and high emotions all around. Finally though, at the end, it was just his father again.

"I'm sorry, y'know. I had t'do it."

"Yeah, I know. Your mom, she knows too, just give her time, eh? So tell me. What did you do?"

He pauses, shifts in the telephone booth.

"Wondered if you'd ever ask that. It's been great, suren s'all better than it sounds. I've starved with beggars, and danced in a prairie during a thunderstorm. I've wondered if I'd live to see the next day, and I've wondered if I wanted to. The basics for living. But I need to know - do you understand-?"

---

“Why you did what you did? Yes. Do you understand why we couldn’t’ve let you go, even if you’d asked?”

“Yeah.”

Now he did.

*Elijah Newton*

## at the beach

---

it was for my moods  
or maybe my mother  
being away so long  
my eyes throbbed  
like two bloody stamps in my head  
salted sounds everywhere  
we were all at the beach  
I could not read the waves  
they blurred in  
the light; the tides were a mess  
the washed grass behind us was so cold  
it was sharp  
here, my father sat alone in the sand  
looking at nothing  
and cried

    like a boy.  
we pretended not to see this  
and time rolled by  
the waves came in  
and the days crashed on  
to pass the time, I stared at my feet  
against the plastic car seat  
and thought of my mother's face.  
it bled with panic  
running into the icy water  
to find her baby  
I had to yell  
something was definitely dead

---

held hostage by the cloudy water  
brushing limply against  
the harsh sea floor  
the forgotten lines, drowned by life;  
the child was dead.  
had it been aborted earlier  
might I have been the next victim  
of my mother;  
the wide blue ocean  
I could only swallow the swell  
that had formed on my dry face  
and shield my eyes from the sight of  
my own poor baby; this infant of my flesh  
floating in and among the waves  
    of the breakwater  
like the tail of a mermaid;  
the child of my laughter,  
my baby was dead.  
so I wept, Daddy,  
I feel so alone.  
you were never the one  
and still my head crawls  
until I shake  
with broken bones and red hot dreams.  
Sometimes when I lie awake  
in bed at night  
I feel as if I am still missing something  
the hand on my thighs or lips  
abreast of the ocean's great wrath.  
I will cry for my mother's hands  
weathered and tired  
against my face.

---

---

I am just like her  
only unreal.  
They will leave the beach  
alone again,  
my mother and father  
alike.

*Inga Webb*

---

## paper flowers

---

I pressed flowers today for you.  
I pressed them until they bled  
    yellow juice running down  
white sheets of paper  
paper white snow.  
I made these paper flowers for you  
and you threw them at me  
in a storm of rain.  
the sky coughed and spit  
millions  
of yellow flowers.  
they scattered the ground like christmas  
and lay like tiny electric planets in the frozen slush.  
the snow splintered my vision  
into purple ribbons.  
and so I danced  
danced for you  
until my breath fell stupid  
and my feet crumbled beneath me  
stunned  
with the weight of my broken paper flowers.  
sighing, you handed me  
a torn stem  
and I could only laugh  
sitting in a sea  
of crushed paper flowers.



## Southern Sweat

---

She brushed by me  
airy like a summer camellia  
Mmm, she was something else  
that white woman  
white like those water-polished pebbles by the  
Lake

She had a brown paper bag in her hands  
and I felt the coolness of the milk jug  
shootin through the thick fibers  
just as good as I felt the stream of air  
rushin out of my oo'ed mouth

That South I just couldn't stand.  
Visitin my grandpa.  
He thought he owned a palace.  
He didn't care if he did his own yard work.  
Muggy heavy heat  
Clammy like a first date hand-holdin  
Hot like the sweat from my first time  
(And I could've been shoppin Chicago for dandy  
clothes  
and lookin for a coffee-colored girl)

But I ran into that summer camellia  
and coffee dribbled from my hormone-plagued  
mind  
and cream filled it instead.



---

And just as airy as she passed me  
the breath passed from me  
And that high prepubescent whistle  
shakin the ground like the trains that I had taken  
down here

And that night, white sheets takin human form  
loudly silently movin in  
bright torches drawin apostrophes in the night  
like the neon lights of Chicago  
and I heard the whoosh whoosh of the walls as  
they went up in flames

Oh my God.  
Oh my God.  
Grandpa's palace is burnin up  
In down south hell and  
the white sheets grab me  
liftin and tosslin me around

They cry  
teach you some—stickiness hundreds times  
worse than southern sweat  
makin passes at a white—innards of pillows  
crustin over  
you son of a—coarseness and itchiness around  
my neck  
think you're so—  
kick your goddamn black—  
BLACK.

## Freckles

---

Sweet longan juice penetrating sticky rice pud-  
ding  
Soup drowning with pregnant wontons  
Moon cakes cut into quarters  
the golden crab eggs shining in thick red bean  
paste  
Smile.  
Keep quiet.  
Fill them three-quarters up with ginseng and  
oolong.  
Serve dishes from the right  
Take away from the left.  
Leave no rice in your bowl  
Each pillar left will get you a freckle on your  
face  
and then you can't find a husband.

You're such a cutie  
you've got the face to marry a millionaire  
Senile hands grasping and shaking a chin  
How many boyfriends you have  
None  
Why  
You don't like anyone  
You don't like anyone  
then go to the boy and give him the trumpet  
Find yourself a millionaire

Violin piano math science

---

almond eyes sleepy under single eyelids  
passive geisha  
dragon lady  
Hot Connie Chung  
You're pretty (like a Benetton model.)

Twinkies bananas  
Shopping like ABCs  
for MITs and Ivys.  
Double coupons  
The price is right.  
BIG MONEY BIG MONEY

*Elaina Lin*

---

## Second grade

---

there was a girl  
a sycophant speed demon  
if only labels could describe

the big teacher sometimes sat at the front  
of the class on a tiny chair greenboards behind  
her  
with bulbous cursive masterpieces carved  
beside their babies - upright and "slightly  
slanted"

I knew them all  
teachers liked my handwriting

before reading with her half moon glasses  
perched on a upturned branch  
she would talk in front on the chair  
to the girl about shirts

Bennetton shirts

the girl and her two sisters had lots of  
shirts

Bennetton shirts

A blue stripe down the middle of the shirt

talk and laugh they would  
about shirts

and I and the class would watch  
the big teacher jostle on the chair  
-reminding me of the bigtop-  
and wait on the itchy orange rug

---

for Wilbur and Charlotte

one day I raced the girl at classwork  
working hard fast - shaking hand nervous  
my ears ripe red with unresolved victory  
finished - slammed pencil and ran

A blue streak across the room

was what I saw  
but I forgot that race cars when they stop  
have to slow down  
if they down want to hit the spectators

or a big teacher

Will you settle down!  
-reverting her eyes to that girl who stopped  
from experience-  
Now Jen, let us see your paper.

*Sean Casey*



---

## red house

---

the house up country  
mid way up the hill  
has no insulation

but lots of layers  
of red paint  
    red paint  
some brick red  
some firetruck red

I've repainted it a couple times  
along the front side that  
faces the road  
avoiding the white chipped paint  
sash and the spider webs

steal slanted shiny roof  
extending an aluminum rim over  
the edge of wood  
above us  
applauses the rain  
for trying to permeate  
for after two hundred years  
the farm house is dry

giving the carpenter ants and raccoons  
in the basement a nice place  
to live and work in fall and winter  
since the house has no heat too

---

we're not up there then  
but now I sit behind a front window  
looking out over  
the chipped sash and watch the lumber trucks  
which would be like firetrucks  
if they were red

Dad said a day'd  
pass without one car once  
without that crazy guy with the jeep  
raising dust too  
zooming by our red house  
which when it had its first coat of red paint  
had to put up with horse carriages  
and the Confederacy

*Sean Casey*

# Gardenia

---

fetch.

fetching in that blue-black dress  
just below your blue-black eye  
you smile.

cling.

clinging swinging yellow thing  
bring me what you always fling  
your underwear again on that chair  
or was it a bed of roses-  
a southwestern flair  
of nothing more than hot air  
breaths of last gasps  
take me there.

pout.

pouting lips on a shiny mouth  
tongue of lashes teeth of thorns  
scream my tender body bag  
of tricks and sticks and flicks of bics  
a solemn, sweet tune  
you hum when I'm with you  
but then again,  
you always do.

fuck.

fucking drugs that meld my brain-  
tied to the smell of the sweet forest air  
the bits of shit you rubbed in my hair

---

brown is brown when the light goes out  
slime is the saliva  
you put out.

sing.  
singing bird on a high piano wire  
hold it in your hand and slit my throat  
deeper than i want it to go  
west,  
far, far away  
damned spot, she said  
and the melting wax covers my skin  
and the tailor's thread  
with a color of cream white that  
seals me dead.

*Joanna Slimmer*

## Journey to Sleep

---

I'm watching Infatuation  
sitting in my hot-box room.  
A broken leaf,  
brown and still  
on my carpet.

The wind that carried  
this tracing-paper butterfly  
through cold nights  
under streetlamps  
and sick spring evenings  
also tore it to pieces  
at the foot of my stairs.

So I shred my feet  
with talonlike nails.  
I chew my lip  
to soft maggoty bits.  
Despondency tickles my ankles.

I want my stomach to be discovered  
from the inside  
by a beautiful finger.  
I want my shoes tied  
and my hair braided.

While I suck sink-white clouds  
through my eyes  
I think about sitting on the roof



---

the evening the grass smelled green  
and I looked harder than ever before  
at that face.

Will the leaf remain forever fragmented on my carpet?  
Or will she pick herself up and go steal a car?

I think about knees  
and bullshit.

*Hillary Chute*

# Tendril

---

she wants to get born,

so she sculpts a cup  
with wet fingers  
to brim over  
with tears  
and piss  
and shit and blood and the lining  
of her uterus.

she pushes  
the green root  
through the soil  
and twists and kisses the sprout  
until she has a flower,  
a soft exploding rocket,  
a violent blossom.  
she wants to gets born

so she creates the skinny pink arms,  
stubby fingers  
and crooked smile.

in a graveyard  
she makes the air thick  
and the trees rustle

and causes the gush and spurt of water  
and the mountains in Montana to tremor

she knows  
all about  
pinkie fingers  
and the soft scary spot  
on babies' heads  
and the marvelous  
thick slime  
that they smack between their lips  
while they sleep.  
She knows all this  
so she swirls up  
a lonesome sadness  
a heavy melancholy  
and a love  
for the feel  
of an infant's tongue.

To watch herself from the ceiling corner,  
asleep,  
yellow,  
wiggling slightly  
while her grandmother tries not to strangle her  
with a white satin bonnet tie.

She sees herself,  
a flower,  
a baby  
so tiny  
a finger might slip  
and puncture her ermine skin.

---

She made herself up,  
to be loved,  
to be dressed,  
to be taught,  
to be the pulpy object  
of an endless fascination  
spilling forth  
into her tiny crib.  
She, a hyacinth,  
conceived in eerie air  
from a weepy girl-child.

*Hillary Chute*

---

## My Vulnerability Dream.

---

I am a too-dressed-up angel,  
teetering around,  
wearing silver,  
trying to avoid grey slush on the sidewalk.  
Someone trips me so I fall,  
becoming a heap of blonde curls  
and dirty linen,  
my hair disheveled  
(but I don't care about my hair)  
my gown too big,  
engulfing me so that  
I'm just a little girl-bundle  
with doleful blue eyes,  
looking up at my captor.  
I sigh and say  
"You've made me a fallen angel"  
    I laugh,  
    I smile,  
but my eyes scream and I'm scared.

*Hillary Chute*



---

## Adolescent in March

---

Things are falling from the sky all the time here,  
there is lightning and incredible rain  
and snow trickling evenly confetti downward  
unrequestedly coating us as it is now  
pushing everyone indoors and brooding  
or out to wander noiselessly beneath it  
unable to see body language through the layers  
the gloves and jackets make us deaf to it.

While brooding I'm restless in my bed  
I've trudged circles into my carpet  
trying different things to force back the gurgles  
that rise after shaking fisted Sundays  
saving my two penny grief for the sake of  
dime afternoons, despite the throbbing  
swallowing doubt for the sake of my head  
for the sake of my eyes because I'm so tired.

What bewilders me as I lie awake wheezing  
is the shock of our new togetherness  
the motion of our common noiseless trudging  
the naked ideas we share on cloudy days  
the grayness that slows us when it's cold  
the need to bring the ground down lower  
where we're all the same height and change isn't as quick  
but slow, imperceptible, the way weather moves.

More things than moods are susceptible.  
Your mere presence in a room could alter my day

---

and with the day goes the sequence of my entire life  
every last second gets shuffled  
and the result is something unrecognizable  
from the life that it was in the moment  
just before I noticed you in repose  
smelling like fabric softener and reading.

It would be fun, don't you think, to harness it?  
This simple power that everyone has  
choosing our words and effecting each other  
profoundly and quiet so no one wakes up  
fingers uprooting homes like tornadoes do.  
And even if we succeeded, what then?  
We would still continue trudging beneath snow  
having transcended the talk show powerlessness.

We're seeking elements to induce laughter  
lighten the load of sweaters and unrequited loves  
Someday we'll glance back at our sulking  
drunk at the reunion and slurreminiscing  
about the marriages we were constructing  
making time capsule mix tapes when we're bored  
revelling in simplicity when we could find it  
constantly knowing we had years until cancer.

*Jay C. Barmann*

## Infatuation from Afar

---

Hypnotized staring into  
puddles of blue and green  
there reflecting  
twice  
on your face,  
my face solemnly longing  
for a glimpse of the tiny fish  
who must live there  
proving twice you are not real  
because you can't be  
                    couldn't be  
too blue  
too green to be water  
but rather some  
mystical imitation created  
to confuse me  
                    leave me  
                    out-of-breath-wondering  
                    in attractionorbit.

Craving nearness  
to press myself as fingers  
into your  
cellophanesurface  
blending beyond  
and through you  
once and finally  
inhaling your eyes

---

toogreentooblue  
and ingesting you.

*Jay C. Barmann*

## Girlfriend

---

I wish I could smoke with you now  
beside your formica kitchen table top  
upon which you've had many meals without me  
and purse my lips and touch your hair  
smooth it down down to your shoulders  
and someone else's polyester garment  
photographing with my mind your eyes  
as they laugh affection into me  
from your stomach rhythm to mine.  
If only we had something to smoke  
that would evaporate doubt and reason  
causing us to forget ourselves for each other  
combine every membrane and marrow  
to form one divine hermaphrodite  
remembering nothing of our mortal failings  
like one bemusedly confused Eve  
and one effusive but refused Adam  
returning to their Goddess' initial creation  
roaring in tandem at the lunacy and charm  
of eurofaggotry — wouldn't that be perfect?  
But my mouth isn't fit to be pulled into yours  
and I must content myself with  
the mere idea of you and your whims  
our common muses and madonnas  
talking on telephones about pop culture phan-  
tasms  
me in postcardland and you in suburbia  
because laughing our lungs out of oxygen



---

seems to console our separated siamese stom-  
achs  
from their constant plea to be rejoined.

*Jay C. Barmann*

## Hallmark Card

---

She shuffles across four braided carpets  
between the television and the kitchenette  
to retrieve some oatmeal and a glass of  
gingerale, or the occasional brandy  
to settle her nerves  
during commercial breaks for game shows.  
She always roots for the handsome man  
with the smile and the suit and the wife  
and two kids seated proudly in the studio audi-  
ence.

We talk on the phone sometimes  
I try to decipher grocery lists  
Her handwriting is deteriorating.  
She must grip the pen with all the muscle  
in her pious fingers  
and scratch out her lower case cursive  
with soap opera grunting in the background  
and God himself pressing his creationfists  
into her half-price pork shoulderblades.

Each day during moments of nearsleep  
or boredom or spiritual restlessness  
she grins with her dentures  
(that she only recently adapted to)  
as she thinks of me moving around lawns  
somewhere down some highway  
with a girlfriend on my arm,  
whom I must be too embarrassed to talk about

---

She kneels down on a braided carpet  
several feet from the television, in the sunlight,  
and prays to this God  
who probably lives in her building  
to keep me safe in my steady orbit,  
ensuring that my stupid adolescence  
doesn't cause any permanent damage.

*Jay C. Barmann*

## She-Hand (in media res)

---

... "Filthy," he thinks,  
so he scrubs his facade clean  
with an ink and paper cloth,  
and inspects the bleu streaked anger  
exposed upon his cheek.  
Last night, a Kiss,  
foreign — like tomorrow —  
permanently scarred in his chestful of envy  
and forehead...  
((He pins himself to a cross of tin and beckons  
for them to worship  
with Us: Stiff-Crotched Believers in Nature.)  
...pressing with relative infinity  
against a throbbing tongue.  
He is a mother-screw,er,  
a drag kingly mass  
crippled in purple hazed hatred,  
alone, longing to be touched...  
(We can see that in his writhing limbs.  
We love it.)  
...by a razor dull geometric  $\partial$  [delta].  
Blond in locks, peach in blush,  
he belts out an anthem and is saved in zippers.  
Tonight he sleeps with bleued, open flesh.  
The Kiss  
arrives later: masked by a she-hand...

---

*Hillary Dresser*

---

# The Talking Drum

---

A woman's Figure and a Baby's soul.

The western world's cello

a curving around shapely body

a birthly buzz singing a spiritual breath.

The African drum

a beast's hide tight over a tree's hollow

a sultry soul song beating blood into life.

Rhythm and Rapture

Rejuvenating

A woman's Figure and a Baby's soul.

The western world's cello

a young smooth bark aging classically

a new born concerto strung delicately

The African drum

a life tied within a seed without pain

a cryless talking cry

Rhyming and Repeating

Sustaining

A woman's Figure and a Baby's soul.

*Dave Callum*



## Gathering the Bones

---

They followed herds of buffalo  
through dusty plains,  
stopped at dusk  
to dance visions by bright flames,  
released spirits  
that would lead to the  
Giver of Life.

In this battle of beings  
there were cries of  
joy without hatred,  
triumphant prayers  
for the giving, the receiving,  
the life in death.

The bones  
of their four-legged brothers  
were long and smooth,  
pure white, taken with gratitude.  
They became alive again,  
were used to paint,  
the handle of a knife,  
a steady hoe  
to reap the earth  
in the growing season,  
a time of nourishment.

Then the white man came  
with his greed for leather and tongue,  
hungry for power.  
The Buffalo stood against still air,

---

cautious, waiting  
under the thin moan of Ghost dancers  
who knew their time had come.  
The earth exploded  
in the roar of rifles  
who left carcasses to rot  
without a prayer.  
The dancers ceased then,  
sinking to their knees  
as if they, too, had touched the angry bullets.  
With trembling fingers  
they gathered the wasted bones  
of their blood-line,  
an offering before the end.

They walked.  
Prodded by the white man's word  
they stepped over earth  
sour with brittle bones,  
to reach the barren reservation  
empty of song or prayer.  
Here, they let go  
of the bodies of spirit, of hope and harmony.  
Too much was gone  
and the bones of the lost  
filled the earth, the air, the water,  
the skin and heart  
of every being.  
Many died here,  
and the ground sustaining generations  
became relentless,  
so full of bones and sorrow

---

that the flowering tree  
could not spring its roots.

But Today,  
something is starting.  
The earth, dry too long  
is cracking with remembrance.  
The bones of the dead  
are rumbling in song beneath.  
Something is waiting to grow,  
to blossom,  
to face the sun and air again.  
And they are waiting too.  
In the quiet of dawn,  
they are softly dancing.  
They are preparing prayers,  
building fires  
and remembering.  
They are gathering the bones.

*Dave Callum*

## Rise

---

Women.

Too many women

hitching rides

to the sky

stealing the glow

I thought was mine

only to give away.

Leaving me

pale

a stripped spirit

bones too tired to dance alone

knowing not

what they sought.

Blind

to fools hoping

that my wings

would rub off on them

so they could pillage,

and soar away

never wondering for my journey home.

And all the while

I,

dripping like a used towel

called this

Love.

*Dave Callum*

---

## Eli's Gift

---

Even with  
the playdough on his hands,  
peanut butter in the corners of his lips  
there is something about him  
cleaner than holy.  
I watch from across the braided rug —  
his trembling fingers (two hands could fit in one  
of mine)  
build lego castles, piece by patient piece.  
His eyes - blue and luminous with innocence  
hold steady on his work,  
ignorant to  
my watchful gaze,  
the fuming cars below,  
even the fuzzy screen of his small T.V.  
And he doesn't hear the dripping faucet,  
the crash and yells from the apartment over.  
He sits, knees bent, perfect cheeks  
glowing with the beauty of  
this world of his own,  
this place that sustains him and trust.  
And I am swept,  
like a wave and a thud and an ache at once  
with love, in purity,  
for this little head of gold,  
for the steadfast hands,  
the swelled arch of his belly,  
the pink and softness of each curled toe.  
And it fills me up,



---

expands the regions in my heart  
swells my blood  
sweetly crowds my throat and eyes.  
But before it can choke, or spill over, or burst-  
he looks at me  
and laughs into the room, only for the sake  
of the music laughter makes.  
And when I smile back,  
he stretches out  
ten tiny fingers  
and invites me in.

*Dave Callum*

# The Flying Dutchman Zone

---

There is a forbidden place  
with a name that lingers in your ear  
for months and weeks and days.

A large frisbee-shaped sign  
marks its boundaries: inside  
you feel dizzy passing the shiny

clicking, squeaking bikes.  
Rows of flat-roofed, skinny houses  
the trampoline effect of the eroded cobblestones

Big heads, round glasses, the K  
of their language. They turn  
and you meet their astonished faces:

They bleep something in their tongue  
which makes your brows unite.  
The potential collisions,

reflections of metal everywhere  
remind you that you have been  
trapped for longer than....

It is the wrong turn that  
reminds you of China.  
Ring, bleep.

---

You attempt to block  
out the noise of the Big Heads with your radio.  
Now you' re sweating

You can't envision an end to this.  
The bike population is increasing,  
multiplying, breeding right there on the  
cobblestones.

You're losing the damn radio station  
and Carmen's soft voice is buzzing and  
scratching  
You don't really notice because the flying  
Dutchman

is what is really in your head.  
You search for the sign marking an end to the  
Uitgezonderd ....Nederland ....Heineken

all this accompanies the ballads of the  
Flying Dutchman on his bicycle riding over the  
cobblestones in the Uitgezonderd.

*Anne Albrecht*

---

## Baby Blue Aluminum Siding

---

It was a weekend, the kind of weekend when I could look straight ahead and not be able to remember what shirt I had put on that morning, the kind of weekend when I didn't bother showering and my hair felt like I had smeared Crisco in it. And while nothing really happened that weekend—I mean, during the day all I did was watch T.V. and lounge around—at night, I dreamt. Oh yes, I dreamt my usual dreams, of girlfriends past who told of their immortal love for me, of girlfriends present who confessed their need for my body, of girlfriends future who flirted endlessly with me. But also, as I floated endlessly around my bed and amongst my sheets, and as a sound grew in my head like the endless crash of surf on shore, I dreamt of a forest, where there dwelt a people larger and wider than humans, but not much bigger than a bulky football player. The forest where they lived was young, with trees not much taller than the maples you see planted in suburbs, destined to die. And as I slept, they slept too, though they slept by climbing into these limber young trees, whose branches reached straight into the air. They clutched the branches, which bent down almost to the ground under their weight. Twenty of these creatures slept in a tree, bending twenty branches to the ground like petals, while the few unwanted boughs stood upright like the pistils of a flower.

But as I continued to sleep, these creatures awoke. Twenty horses were tethered around the tree, and as the creatures climbed down the tree, each landed on a horse, which he untied. The branches flew back into place, one

---

by one, and when all of the creatures left the tree, they galloped away in a swarm.

I followed them in my dream as they rode through an endless stretch of maples like the one they had left. Every once in a while, they crossed a strip of asphalt which continued on through the same maple trees until it disappeared. Sometimes they crossed two strips of asphalt, one closely following the other. These strips were wider, and were often separated by two cliffs of rock, which the creatures dismounted to navigate.

After endless travel, the maples thinned out and were replaced by dogwoods, which were in turn replaced by goldenrod, then clover growing on hard gravel. My gaze shifted from the riders below to the horizon ahead. The setting sun in my eyes, all that I could see was a sea of baby blue houses, completely encased in aluminum siding.

As the riders neared, they thinned out, heading to different sections, to different houses, where doors, disguised under baby blue aluminum siding, opened, and daughters ran out to greet the riders leaping off their horses.

I awoke in my aluminum-sided house with the sun in my eyes and a cramp in my leg and I thought to myself that olive green was prettier than baby blue.

*Tristan Roberts*



---

# Paralysis

---

The old blue streaked green door.  
Dripping icicles —  
sharp, rippling daggers.  
Did you know that a woman  
(or was it a man?)  
was paralyzed by a falling icicle?

Snow covered walk.  
Vanishing foot prints.  
The flowers of before stick out of white,  
vestiges of summer's fall.  
Lawn chairs.

Not-so-evergreen bush  
where the frost elves live.  
My window their canvas,  
their diamond hands  
create an icy landscape for morning.

Wooden cat skeleton perched on the sill.  
Yards. Hedgerows.  
Windows of souls I don't know.  
Angels—  
one a girl, the other a boy.  
Mail slot.

The door's frozen open.  
The door's frozen shut.

*Jess Lunt*

---

## Astronomically Incorrect

---

The trees darkening  
Crepuscular stains.

The sky opens  
screaming in blue.

"Those are the Pleiades,  
the seven sisters,  
pursued by Orion  
and his dog.  
I can tell you  
their story"

Meteor showers  
Rambunctious polywogs  
streak across the sky  
Fiery snakes devouring the dark.

The ancient rocks push up  
against my back  
Cooling as the sun's heat  
slithers out.

"That one left a yellow streak."  
"Did you see that?  
It was almost red"  
Now green.  
All colors into black.

---

Three at once  
Straight through the summer triangle  
and on 'till morning.  
Watch out for Cygnus,  
the Northern Cross,  
the swan.

A dog barks  
and mine answers.  
Echoes and disappears.

. . .

After the show  
we creep down the stumbling trail  
Our eyes have not adjusted  
to the newly-fallen dark.

The lakes are losing  
their silvery twilight glow

And we're surrounded by the  
crickets' night prayers.

*Jess Lunt*

---

## Paint-Box Turtle

---

“These are erasers—  
Not candy—  
Not to be eaten”  
The warning label  
you can’t read, reads.

It’s noon, then midnight  
Sitting in front of a barber shop  
under the red and white twirling thing  
watching the patterns on your bare feet.

Your lover has decided to be gay.  
Your roommate is moving to Pennsylvania  
to make chocolate from plutonium cows.

An orange dog with a telephone cord tail  
runs backwards up the wrong side of the street.

It’s time for your race.  
You run through the pink styrofoam maze  
but your shoelace is undone  
catches on the fan  
spinning over the edge of the barn.

---

You spin too.  
Blue sky under your feet.  
Your best friend sits below you  
playing with your favorite paint-box turtle,  
Penelope .

Keep turning  
you've forgotten how to tie your shoes  
and you hope the laces won't melt.

*Jess Lunt*



---

## Rain

---

She was alone in the room and the lights were dimmed so that only the shapes of the furniture and her body could be seen against the shadows. This was Jenna's bedroom and she lay curled up on her narrow twin bed holding the blue phone to her ear. A tattered teddy bear, missing one button eye and half an ear, lay next to her, and the glossy movie posters she liked to hang on the walls gleamed with the passing headlights that shone through her window pane which was burred against the October rain. Next to the posters she had hung a bulletin board covered with photos. There she was, with the rest of the squad, all perfect replicas of each other in their short yellow skirts and wide smiles. There were her mother and she, grinning over a birthday cake, faces glowing with the candles' light. And there was Paul. She had thought it odd that he had given this picture, his broad face, set with the serious concentration of the game, unsmiling above his blue and white uniform. But she liked this photo. It was the only one she had of him, and her friends always glanced at it a little jealously when they came in.

Now she stared at it as she spoke into the phone, "Hello?" In the empty room her voice wasn't really a question, only a plea to the silent buzz he had left her with. She knew he was gone. Whatever connection she had with him through the wires had been severed by a cold click, leaving her alone again. She stared at the rain outside and pressed her hand to her throat to stifle the rising lump throbbing against her hot skin like something very much alive, struggling to get out, to burst, to be free. "I

will not cry," she whispered, and swallowed heavily before removing her hand and wiping it on the bedspread. There was no time for crying now.

Jenna stared at the phone in her hand, then turned her head to look about the room. The surrounding silence filled her brain, pressing down on her. The walls stared back, offering no advice. She turned back to the phone and re-dialed. It rang twice and then she heard his voice. She used to love this voice, love hearing it across the phone as she lay on her bed and pictured his smiling face. She realized that he was speaking, and his tone was growing impatient. "Mmm, hello? Jesus Christ. Jenna, is that you again?"

She opened her mouth, then shut it firmly. She would think first this time. Her fingers tapped against the receiver in time with her shaking leg. She had to say something. Her voice came out louder than she wanted, trembling a little. "Don't you ever hang up on me." Her hand felt sweaty on the plastic of the phone, but she gripped it to her ear, waiting for a word, something more than nothing.

On the other end Paul sighed heavily and then spoke. "Jenna, I am so sick of this. How many times are gonna call me and then sit there like a mute? There's nothing left for me to say." She opened her mouth and almost spoke. She could tell him that it would be okay, that she would take care of everything. This was something she could do. She sat up a little against the headboard, but then she felt her teeth clamp down, surprisingly hard. Her eyes looked down at her empty hand lying on her lap, stretched out, palm up. His voice broke her thoughts "Jenna! Would you fucking talk?!"

---

"We're not finished, Paul," she answered. "I need to talk. I need you to talk, too." She paused, her eyes scanning the window, streaked with silver threads of water. But only blackness looked back. Outside the cars groped by, lights cutting through the rain, shining into her room and then leaving it dark again. Suddenly she found it very hard to breath.

Then he answered her, "Look, I thought we discussed all this. Come on. It's not that bad." His voice wheedled at her, making her almost wish she could believe. Instead she swallowed hard and spoke back, "Maybe not for you."

"Oh, cut the fucking attitude," he snapped. "You know how much I've been thinking about this." He paused and when he spoke again his voice softened, coaxed "Didn't I skip my game to talk to you? Jenna? Hello?" She squeezed her eyes shut and turned her head into the pillow, pushing her cheek into its cool, soft fabric. She felt the room's motionlessness, the heat from the radiator stifling every breath of movement, weighting her body down so that each limb felt as if it were being pulled to the floor. Outside, the rain drove against the house and in the silence she heard a soft murmur from this end, like voices and laughter mingling, like a T.V. show.

Before she could ask him what it was, he spoke again "Listen, why don't you come over? We can talk. And my parents aren't here..." Her hand gripped the phone as she punched the bed with her fist. She stifled the scream in her throat, the anger flooding into her veins, behind her eyes, filling her mouth with its acid taste. Instead she snorted, "Oh that's a great idea, Paul. How the hell do you think this happened in the first place?" Her hand



fluttered to her mouth, but the words were already out. She felt the burning flash receding as he inhaled sharply on the other end.

She shut her eyes tightly and pulled at the skin on her bottom lip with her index nail. "Look, it wasn't my fault, o.k.? Don't even start this rape bullshit. You knew what what was going on."

"I didn't think, I mean, I didn't think..."

"Yeah, well, don't blame that on me, o.k.?"

"Can I even talk? I mean, can we really talk about this? Because I don't think you can, and I'm the one getting screwed."

"Fuck - off!" and then the phone went dead.

"Paul!" But there was no answer, only the thick air of her room and the drumming rain, beating a staccato echo against her window again and again - his name and face reverberating before her.

She pressed down the receiver and held her breath before dialing again. This time he would not hang up. She exhaled and smoothed down her comforter, then folded her hand neatly in her lap, keeping it steady. She let it ring ten times, whispering to herself "come on, answer, answer..."

Finally he picked up, his voice sounding low and tired. "Hello?"

"Paul, I'm sorry. I don't want to fight." Her hand clenched the pink edge of her pillow and worked it between her fingers as she cradled the phone, waiting for an answer. The background noises on his end were louder now, and she recognized them as a T.V. show. She made herself breath in as she tightened her grip on the pillow, and then he spoke quietly.

---

"Okay, fine. Can we just talk later? I want to watch my show." Jenna felt the heaviness of her body on the bed, her heart thudding, blood like tar moving through her veins. She looked at the rain, then back at the phone. Her voice was a whisper, controlled shakiness. "I don't know if I can handle this Paul. I'm just so tired."

"Then go to sleep," he answered, his voice sounding fuzzy, far away.

"No, I mean tired of everything. Last night I couldn't sleep. All I could do was lie in bed and think. I almost went into my mom's room..."

Paul's voice cut her off with a single warning: "Jenna."

"Don't worry, I didn't." She paused, hearing only the laughtrack in the background, Paul's even breathing, two beating hearts separated by wires. "It's just... it's just... Paul?" She waited for a word, something to fall on.

"Mmmhmm?" he answered.

"Are you listening or watching T.V.?"

He sighed "Jenna, how many times are we gonna go over this? I'm tired too, you know."

"But you can watch T.V." she heard herself say, then felt her face grow hot.

"What the hell does that have to do with it?" he asked, and she had no answer. He didn't ask again, but fell back into silence.

Jenna waited and then spoke, "Paul, I'm just a baby."

"What?" he said, "sorry, I didn't hear you, I..." His voice died off and then she heard him laughing. She heard the soundtrack laughing behind him, and suddenly there were a million people, laughing, everywhere. She was the only one not laughing.

"I hate you," she whispered, her hands clenched, nails digging into her palms.

"Huh? Wait, what?"

"Nothing," she answered, speaking so he could hear this time.

"Oh, o.k. Listen, Jenna, I gotta go. This show is classic - put it on channel five."

"Wait!" she said.

"Yeah?"

"Just stay on for a few more minutes."

"Why?" he asked, his voice sounding like it was miles away.

"I don't know," she whispered, biting her lip hard, tasting blood and salt. Underneath her the bed swayed, and suddenly she felt like she was falling, down, down, too fast to catch a breath of air, rain and smiles streaking by, out of reach.

"Well, then I'm gonna go, o.k.? I'll talk to you tomorrow." His voice was clear, almost happy. He sounded normal.

"I love you, Paul," she said, and closed her eyes to the tears that had already begun to fall.

"O.k., I'll talk to you later," he said.

And even as she heard the click, she gasped, "Paul, wait! Hello?".

She listened to the silence for a minute and then laid down the phone. For what seemed like a very long time she lay on her side and looked at it, studying the receiver, the cord, the numbers that always added up to zero. It would be so easy to pick it up again. Finally she turned her head and rose, becoming aware of the hot tears streaking her face, the sob rising in her throat. She made



---

her way through the blurry room to the window and pushed it open, feeling the cold, wet air at once. She inhaled, letting the heavy rain mix with her tears, the wind rush into her. She closed her eyes and let the night in, let it fill her bones and veins. Jenna stood there and cried without noticing, listening to the blackness. In the steady beat of the rain she thought she heard his name again, pounding against home and sky. Slowly, she opened her eyes and stretched both hands out the window, into the night. But then it was only rain.

*Dave Callum*

## Good-bye to the Moist Star

---

And when she looked out over the protean waters and  
Noticed someone else calling her name,  
She shuddered, jolted.  
Groping for Luna  
Constantly following the moonpath through the  
nightdark waters  
Had convinced her to deny  
The fire dripping oozing licking lush core.  
Not being waifish,  
Not being sallow,  
She had failed to absorb (from the paler sphere  
alone)?  
A certain essential element,  
Necessary in order to radiate.

And when she stretched out over the tailored  
lawns and  
Noticed that golden skin housed those blue  
veins,  
She hesitated, intrigued.  
Why try to obstruct the balcony people's evening  
views  
As they were obstructing hers.  
Rather roll the fireball once more  
Over the tongue and capture their cameras on  
film.

---

(And when she let herself realize, as opposed to  
before,

That the armadillo's armor, the porcupine's  
quills, were not hers to use as her own

She ran.

She tasted crushed berries between her lips as  
The manicured flames of crimson blossoms  
sneered,

But the decalled old car with it's ignorant, and  
also moustached, driver seemed to under-  
stand.

She let them pass by. )

And as she observed the sinking of light and  
epiphany,

lush orange gives way to somber blue  
nectar dribbles down her chin

Resigned to avoiding thought,  
She drifted.

The half-sphere essence still hovered,  
Lying in wait for completion

Each blade of grass still struggled with  
conformity while

in her sphere she was still running,

Past the tired cigarette ladies,  
moustached as well

Into the (alms of the) trees by the highway.

*Eve Lubin Bradford*

## I feel a thickness

---

I feel a thickness  
passing between movements  
my force  
extending off  
into the sensual brownness  
of it all  
where, beneath the  
wearied footpaths,  
life germinates  
and maggots go on about their  
worldly ways  
Below this surface rises  
the heat-lust  
of a new season,  
the constant motion  
of the unborn

rock me to sleep  
baby mine  
roll me slow  
'till the sun don't shine

Pitching and thrusting  
the crack is forced to reveal  
the jade  
jaded  
fligh-high dizzyspace  
Hold on tight to that  
red balloon string

---

as it slips through skinned knuckles  
don't dare  
fear the fall  
terra firma will  
catch cushion comfort  
aching new-souls  
Languid fumes  
absorb through the pores  
Osmosis of the highest order  
on each side a balance  
on each side a symmetry  
on each, an equilibrium

rock me to sleep  
baby mine  
roll me slow  
'till the sun don't shine

*Eve Lubin Bradford*

---

## Chain Of Events

---

What will he say?  
when he sees her,  
rain trickling down a red, rusted barrel,  
leaking from a jagged edge  
onto a cracked concrete bedding.  
As she steps through a darken fog  
clutching her nighty with a well licked thumb  
a ragged brown Barbi  
dancing cha-cha  
hanging by her platinum, mottled hair  
from a grubby, pale blue hand.

Will the tracks clatter together  
a rushing roar  
and a screech of aging metal.  
God knows  
he has tried  
how he's tried  
to surmount a barrage of biological excuses  
reasons  
which he now needs more than ever  
like hot sun melting over his eyes  
sweet honey sliding down his well worn tendons  
over callused, pocked veins,  
onto wooden fingers he can lick  
he can sell.  
Fingers which he clenches right now,  
now as a foot descends  
to the first step of the train



---

a delicate set of five porcelain toes  
: he has kissed each in turn  
this little piggy  
this little piggy  
this little piggy.  
It tickles.

He should have never gone to market.  
This, his age old alibi,  
his Judas.  
Stumbling over disorganized flecks of black and  
white,  
through produce of Idaho and New Jersey,  
his eyes averting from the sweet, blood apples.  
Through a haze of Nausea  
he rushes into the next aisle  
a run of muscle and plastic,  
tissue and napkins,  
his body self-visualized,  
torn into warm bloody papers,  
his mind racing,  
running  
as he slides across the black tile,  
ballads falling softly,  
sweetly,  
from the sheet rocked ceiling  
onto his aching ears.  
This ones a V.U. song - he's heard it.  
A shame to come to such.

As the store is closing, he clears his mind  
hanging gardens of juicy cobwebs.

Networks snapping  
synapses buzzing a single command,  
those fingers  
claw as a golden boy pulls himself  
smiling,  
to the top of Monadnock.  
Fingers that reach into a sweat colored jacket,  
two sizes too expensive,  
bought second hand from his mother.  
As he reaches for his weapon  
- he will never remember which one-  
he smiles at the girl  
who tends the only cash register  
in the only store  
in the only town in his memory.  
And as he makes love in her  
beautiful, young eyes,  
he explodes  
vomit oozing from his taut lips,  
held back sobs when he kneels,  
collapsing into the corner of  
Alpo and Black River Coal,  
heaving, heaving, and dry heaving.  
His dazed and haggard face upturned  
towards the pity of the girl,  
the lightened, gentle face of the girl,  
the girl,  
who had this sweet Jesus been?  
Had he walked her home one night?  
from a black, ribboned dance,  
both of them grinning slightly,  
mostly awkward moments and a

---

photograph of two persons out of place,  
out of priority.

Who had this young Jesus been?

Who had saved his life,  
stolen his soul.

*Sasha Kipka*

## “My Womb Hurts As If Someone is Pulling It Out”

---

is that how it feels?  
pressured into a greasy corner by  
oily hands  
pawing, pinching fingers  
laughing at Your eyes.  
a myriad of screams  
in the brown paint and the  
hidden scent among the leaves.  
Your daughters gone.

\*

Your mind's gone blank  
Your imagination's still real enough  
You've never felt so impersonal  
so free  
the weight of your breast is all You seem  
to recognize  
You always wondered how a machine  
felt,  
well now You are one.  
Your cold figures are accurate  
calculated,  
You don't speak, You spew data.  
Your embodied, a higher being  
You're a dove, rusted twice over with  
peeling coal  
in a stratosphere of gravity You do not  
exist.

---

light, transparent like as You pierce silver  
clouds  
condensation upon Your brow mingling  
with blood  
- these human thorns scratch deep.

\*

but no pain.  
the machine in You marvels,  
these antibodies,  
those little cells swimming cross stream  
towards the terrible hurting.  
little firemen pouring hot steam upon a  
throbbing wound.

like the kitten,  
Your Tabby Tabitha,  
Your pain is drowned.

\*

upwards You flap,  
creak-creakety-creak,  
“are you done?”  
“no, nearly”  
and Your minds a blank screen,  
You cannot register a setting,  
just a sense of height,  
altitude.  
a purple scar upon white tissue,  
as You pause to think  
am I done, am I there?  
if You are, what next?

\*

a question forms on Your whitened lips,  
slapped roughly away,  
but You've already thought it  
You just haven't said it.  
will You meet him, after  
afterwards  
after You've signed a page  
scrawled a name - it doesn't matter which  
one-  
this pen seems odd to Your hand,  
it's shaking.  
but will You meet him,  
could You shake his hand, spit into his  
hazeled eye.  
a long spit, sweetly onto a gnarled,  
blurred face.  
he isn't good  
You think.

\*

Your body's switched lovers,  
far too many cells to handle,  
and the pains drawn up its window  
as if to hail You with a loud raucous cry,  
as Your neighbor did before this all  
started  
the callous wave of a flowered skirt  
the slightest breeze welcomed to cool  
Your torn hair.  
You have never felt so completely guilty.

\*

will You still be loved?  
a question You will never answer.



---

who loves a defective toy,  
the Cookie Monster puppet  
that only managed a sputtered,  
coo- cooo- cookies  
as his long blue cord was  
pulled from his body.  
but You loved him, didn't You,  
he was Your first and only.  
he'll be Your last.  
wake up, darling,  
my sweetness.  
forgive Your pain  
Your daughter' s gone;  
isn't she?

*Sasha Kipka*

## Kiss Withdrawal

---

After this they took to kissing a great deal,  
but before this laughter  
before this raw, eclectic joy,  
two broken glasses dripped mulled red wine,  
warm Juice  
graped a hundred months  
aged with oaken casks in a Mont Blanc cellar  
provincial in its dereliction.  
Two broken hands clasped waist high,  
elongated into prayer,  
dug into wet soil  
damp stains of earth clutched in between  
torn bitten nails  
pared close by yellow uneven teeth.

There had been no laughter before this  
only a tightened line of conversation  
just as the golden door  
in Harriots on Beacon st.  
A garble of verbs and improper predicates  
that swung out, swung in.  
Proper and steady and lifeless.  
Blackened, hollowed eyes  
upon an icon of bloodied visages  
fillets of roses heaped together  
burning and toasted with champagne,  
bottled in Californian plastic.  
toasted when they were saddened,  
perhaps a little insane with grief.

---

A communicated pain stretched between them  
like some  
timeless hourglass.

Even during this there had been  
no recognizable reevaluation, redemption.  
No sense of savior,  
No Christ.

Only a 12" black and white Toshiba,  
stacked precariously on a stack of Time - Life  
books  
too commercialized to go unpurchased.  
World Religions threatening to topple and smash  
this  
new opiate,  
grinding tubes into  
pasted images of Tao and Siddhartha  
brothers to every raped mind in every abyss.  
Threatening to pave a path of Nirvana  
right through this prefabricated home,  
a sweet home,  
Norman Rockwell for 24.95\$ plus tax.

After this, though,  
they took to kissing a great deal,

As I've said.  
kisses so sweet you could hardly imagine.  
Kisses that wrapped a young girl's candle blown  
birthday cake  
into a man's first shave  
and a woman's first orgasm.

---

Earthquaking fire.  
Kisses so surreal, so everlasting,  
there tongues locked tight in mouths of bone  
twirling  
sliming together  
threaded worms squirming in old Baxtor's Tin  
Polish can  
of soil and bait.

*Sasha Kipka*

SASHA KIPKA '91 IS CURRENTLY STUDYING AT ST. ANDREWS. HE  
BEGINS WHAT THE COURANT HOPES TO BE A TRADITION OF  
POETRY AND FICTION BY ALUMNI OF THE SCHOOL.

# Desire Must Be a Measure of Love

---

walking on true legs  
on a ground trail of hope and  
the misery of gnawing,  
peckish insecurity  
is every creature that loves.

where the beast meets  
at a junction and yells  
to the blood coagulating  
simply in the pan  
that they have an overwhelming urge

to be shaken and touched  
never too much  
ever so much  
down the tickle curve inside the leg  
straight around and swirling  
into the eyes that,  
hopefully,  
glue and stick and want

sturdy exception is never  
an easy thing  
never as simple as conception  
sometimes harder than shrieking, ripping labor  
but always impossible without  
the mace made of nutmeg,  
so much for so little,  
tossed over the easy coolness

on the dead street where the  
lazy red stop watches  
waiting for the tender slip of  
an arm that is a union between  
two separate feelings that,  
in order to be proven,  
must intertwine and consummate

an abacus,  
where the black shining beads  
slide down onto one another  
bump and grind  
sliding, hating to leave,  
has the same want for magnetic  
symbolism  
for magnolia's display

the final desire that  
flows into the eaves  
wets the eyes  
proves the love to the stubborn  
female heart that is waiting at the door  
ready to cross,  
but not without stimulation, invitation

*Hannah Sharpless*



---

# Ravish Me

---

delete me of my brain that i may roam the world  
free without the hazard of  
thought and the placement of residual desires  
encompassed by the pounding gust of need that  
follows each journey  
into the realm of the conscious realization

that reputed signs of life are simply mistakes  
made by the computer two to the left of  
your mayor's post office  
box  
so it doesn't really occur to a person to  
check the box and the job is left  
for another who wanders the floor of

linoleum as though worshipping a god and looks  
up  
only to see the red of cinnamon fall and stick as  
an offering of love and infatuation with an  
unhaveable entity  
that all may touch but never know til  
they might become it in a later experience  
where les singes jump on beds and  
my cousins live in new jersey with their pigs  
and father.

*Hannah Sharpless*

# Mama

---

She's broken herself down  
for your antebellum smile  
sometimes fingering the daylight  
or not  
All because the last best breath on earth  
gave in finally  
and only then after confusion  
collapsed beneath the rhythm of bitten finger-  
nails tapping.  
Because it was then that her oyster parts began  
to beat again  
the tall parts of her insides came alive,  
they went bone jumping, out of their skins  
comforted the way win wound between their  
ribs

and she began crying in the voice that  
sounds like wanton kittens  
in torrential hunger because she still could

And could even remember being born from um-  
bilical you  
all of it up until the day you became a shadow  
and couldn't, wouldn't, play  
because of your sickly spirit eaten,  
could only sleep and scream, and how  
you climbed into your paintings and their  
angry red faces

---

resenting the interruption.  
she didn't even ask you for a sandwich

just climbed into the octopus facade and the  
Superman dream  
took to sleeping with her shoes on in case of fire  
beneath the dim green slander and the largeness  
of the day  
the length of her skirts  
and red rim of mama's eye.

while other hymen-minded mothers  
were busy with the here-all  
and the bussel-sponge,  
forgot the witch baby in the drum thumping  
heat of summer

Arms round her knees  
her knuckles went white  
she'd been everywhere  
replacing things like she preferred them  
and all those faces...

manifested a shell from within  
her colder pieces triumphant  
because she had to  
(you were fighting nightmares)  
she was tired of sleeping anyway.

*Reby Walsh*

## ...Ditch Your Sack or Yourself

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The cathedral is in the very midst of the city, aging stone reworked with concrete. Its stone buttresses and steeple strive to touch Heaven, but it's surrounded by buildings that effortlessly scrape the sky. Set back, derelict by day, its windows are dark and begrimed. It's walls curiously free of graffiti, it's the sort of place neighborhood children speak of in whispers and child-chants.

One brick Two brick  
See the church go int'it  
Johnny did and Johnny's blind  
Tell me what did Johnny find?  
One brick, Two brick...

And so on.

Later, after the children had been put to bed, the others come. In knots and bunches, couples or alone from the shadows and city streets. They await the opening of their haunt, an urban ritual.

Remember the first night you came, a slightly chill spring night, and the doors had not yet opened. You were one of the curious, lingering on the fringe of light. Remember hearing people breathing, the isolated greeting from one to another, but a silence dominated that made idle conversation blasphemous.

Now enter and pass through an antechamber that features little other than dust and old billings, and a place to ditch your sack, or yourself. Or look past the the next door, and enter the soul.

To find yourself blinded by lights that arc above your head. Lightning from the lunatic fringe. The effect

is pure theatrics, making you feel like the main attraction. It's quite a feat, considering the distractions.

To your left a lady who, removing her coat, wears a snake instead of a shirt. She and her drape look at you sanguinely. To your right, bruised youth in leather and defiance, feral beneath face-paint. Ahead of you, the mad revel begins on a swelling discord, and you are pushed in, pushed past, by some underage child wearing Christmas choir angel wings and a halo.

In the cavernous sanctuary, see tonight's group where the altar used to be, and feel the noise wash over you like a throbbing baptism. Drum and bass preach away behind an electric sermon like a distorted victim's scream bursting supernova, Carmina Burana on speed and black lace. See discarded confessionals by the light from massive torches set into the pillars and walls, as flickering shadows dance over chains and roses, proliferate decoration hung from every edifice. Dangling, jangling figures hang by manacles from the majestic pillars, and you wonder if they get paid, then realize no one's ever seen them anywhere else. No one. Cross the floor, mount stairs that are left-over fire escapes to the balcony. See the lady they call Sister Mary working behind the bar. Some say she's still a nun. She never speaks.

Rest your head against a wall, bump against a plaque you've never seen. Read:

"...they had simpler concerns. Keeping the children from the roofs at night, the bereaved from crying out too loud, the young in summer from falling in love with the human."



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Close your eyes and stop thinking. Loose yourself in the swelter of bodies, each trying to be unique. Blend into the identity of the bizarre, the freakish. Find some hairline fracture in your self, and use it to shatter what you were. Open your eyes, and see the melted throng beneath you. They are the beautiful and the strong, with untamed spirit and tainted soul.

( quote for plaque on wall taken from Clive Barker's Cabal )

*Elijah Newton*

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## Bird (for Charlie Parker)

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A hoot and a holler  
might knock you senseless  
at Carnegie Hall on Wednesday.  
A handlebar-mustached St. Christopher  
in the parlor across the street  
swears like Do-Re-Mi  
he'll be your gravedigger come next March.

Pin-striped Negro in loafers,  
you used to fancy this part of town  
your own.  
Jiminy Cricket's kicked off  
like yesterday's heroin  
and channel three shows "Bloomdido"  
butchered by a white boy.

There was a stiff in the room down the hall on  
the twelfth,  
cockeyed and French-cuffed  
he'd waited outside your door,  
with a muttonchop on the table and one foot  
in his grave,  
you'll wonder why you didn't invite him in.

Charred spoons in the kitchen and  
two fingers of Jack Daniel's suck  
a straight flush off the table  
—"pick up the beat, mix it up a little"—  
cotton ain't good for much else

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and Lester promised he'd leave you his horn.

How much can you stand to lose?  
Skinny curtains don't quite reach the floor  
and a six-year-old cut his knee on the mail slot  
you nailed shut.

Rickets in the stage chair at the Embassy  
kept you in suspense  
during the fourth solo in "I Got Rhythm"  
George and Ira took the money.  
You'll keep the applause.

Tomorrow you'll open a window and sing.  
You'll cross 24th for a pack of Pall Malls.  
Passing the parlor window you'll notice St. Chris  
and this time  
he'll wink.

*Amos Barclay*

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## Radio in Spring

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Junkyard Paul's tied up today.  
Upside down in a '71 Frigidaire with the door  
ripped off  
there's a grin as he swings from his knees  
and throws us sunshine  
from the face of his Nite-Glo compass.  
Little Richard's hummable  
—some crush tale in velvet,  
some anthem of the lonely dreamboat—  
pumps from a near window and filters the air  
like overcut smack.  
He's a leap-first kind of a hero,  
our dangling stripeshirt B-boy.  
Kicking up gravel in a mother's ruckus  
he practices his handstands  
and calls the crabgrass by name.  
Jimmy Cagney in rubber sheets.  
The last of the great Badasses  
clad in Zips.  
Upright and fleetfoot  
in his t-shirt swiped from Ernie  
he piles weeds,  
sand-colored glass, burnt sheet metal,  
loose curtain rods, flowers,  
empty boombox speakers and grocery store  
dividers  
—the bonfire of the hungry suburb—  
and surreptitiously hugs a depression-era fender  
that some hot shit assembly-liner

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probably blew the whistle on  
before it hit the road.

*Amos Barclay*



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## Coyote

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Twice back now from the station,  
the Double-E's get switched from St. Louis  
to Chicago.  
Goo-goo clusters fresh  
from the nearest Stuckey's  
stick to the radio and ash-colored cinder blocks  
thrust the wheelless body of a Buick to the heav-  
ens  
from a nearby acre.

Everyone's had a vision:  
Jesus as a blues singer beside a tired Sycamore  
somewhere in Mississippi.  
Meeting Joyce over beers at a bar in Manhattan.  
Your best friend from high school paralyzed  
underneath a still running Harley  
—he'd thrown off his helmet  
and spat bloody teeth onto the asphalt,  
pulling himself up holding the trunk of a  
roadsign—  
he'll wonder why you never wrote.  
No one told you to get your ass to Kansas.

The light on your alarm clock attracts fireflies.  
You don't go out in the rain  
and the sword-swallower next door  
slaps his bald head and sings a drunk Tony  
Bennett  
way past midnight.

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The disposal won't chew glass.  
The dents in the refrigerator door won't heal.  
You try not to watch the Pullmans when they  
    come and sometimes  
the cracks in the ceiling get bigger.

Still, there's no twister a-comin'.  
There hasn't been a power failure since '63  
and when the pay-phone breaks down  
you thank your lucky stars.

The brakeman gets up at nine and knows your  
    name.  
He has false teeth and has decided  
that the only reason you are here  
is to find out how many quarters  
you can fit under the fourth chair leg  
that doesn't quite reach the floor.  
You've promised to buy him a drink  
when you know the answer.

Someday they'll rediscover silent movies.  
Some gin-swilling ape of a philanthropist  
will build you a movie house all your own  
and you'll invite the schoolkids in from the win-  
    dow  
and tell them they can watch  
only after a good game of cops and robbers.

"Just what the hell are you doing out there?"  
You're rewriting Ecclesiastes.  
You're playing centerfield for the Mets.

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You're stealing toy guns from Stop n' Shop's.  
"Nothing much."

*Amos Barclay*

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## Nameless Veteran

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He waits for those leaving the theater.  
They walk past him with their diamond rings  
And their alligator purses.  
They, with all their engraved money clips  
encased jewels, Matisses and Monets, and  
Large homes with fireplaces and dens.

He grew up in a fishing village  
With miles of water between him,  
And them.  
For his benefit, the mother brought him to the  
United States of America,  
Where he gave up his identity to fight for his  
new  
Country.

Bits and pieces of bodies scattered everywhere,  
No yellow ribbons,  
Only silent protestations to the death he encountered.  
All he knows are the images of his friends being  
blown apart  
Every night he falls asleep

On the pavement of a street in our magnificent  
country.  
Dressed in handouts from various shelters and  
the  
Salvation Army. Salvation?

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His monthly veteran and welfare aids buy his  
daily bread and coffee,  
Stale, cold, and inedible.

So when these fur covered movie goers see him,  
He can beg for some cold coins, that can buy  
him

A fresh cup of coffee, in exchange for his dig-  
nity.

Of course. But he is only a nameless veteran,  
With a face and a name.

Bill, from La Rochelle, who gave up his sanity  
and dignity, defending America.

*Melissa Ellis*



## Lady Day

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bruise your heels  
on the sidestreets  
silver noon - brick and sky merged  
silver day.

Harlem.  
Immaculate, breeds  
swollen sunsets  
drawn, soiled at last, into your  
diamond eyes.

Harlem  
has the legend's Rose.  
Voices under cobblestone  
under fine brim under coarse hair  
your step, your pass.

Lady Day  
Walk. Wait. Stay.  
I know you are Soul,  
you are The Soul, but of  
whose angel?

*Eireann McCarthy*

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## Jack's Song

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Martin was walking because he didn't have a car. In all truth, he didn't even have a driver's license. It was too much of a pain in the ass he told people when they asked, and besides, he didn't mind walking. This wasn't far from true, especially on bright fall days like today where summer's last sun peeped through the cracks of cool air and lit dappled shadows on the sidewalk. Martin was walking back to his apartment, holding a bag of fresh bagels and humming. He didn't whistle because it was too hard to keep a tune. Instead he hummed loudly, breaking into a verse of words every so often. It's a beautiful day, Martin thought, and feeling the warm smell of the bagels rising from the bag his stomach gurgled eagerly. Laughing out loud, Martin began to run home.

Home was a tall, peeling, white house divided into apartments by the black letter slots out front. Skipping up the stairs two at a time he paused only to pet the landlady's fat orange cat lying at the top. Looking nothing more than bored and slightly annoyed in the face of Martin's wide grin, the cat swished his tail and walked away. Martin stood and adjusted the bagels to his left hand as he rang the buzzer for his apartment - 204. Through the door's window he could see his reflection, and he quickly smoothed down a few dark curls, still smiling a little with the day's happiness. He hoped Jack would be up by now. After a few seconds waiting and another buzz, he heard the electronic click unlatching the door, and he walked inside.

Going up the stairs, he could already hear the mu-

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sic Jack played on his acoustic drifting through the door and down the hallway. Martin stopped a few feet from the door and listened. He thought he could listen to Jack's song forever, let the music take hold and pull him along. He could almost see through the door - Jack's unwashed head bent down in concentration, the lanks of dark blond hair hanging in his eyes, the fingers moving over the vibrating strings with expertise and will. Martin felt a flood of love sweep over him, and he closed his eyes and breathed deeply, letting the last few notes penetrate his skin. Then there was silence, and the time to open his eyes and walk inside.

Jack was sitting where Martin knew he would be, on the floor in front of the brown pillowed couch, wearing only a yellowed tank top and boxer shorts, still holding his guitar. He looked up as the door opened and his cloudy gray eyes met Martin's moist brown ones and held for a beat. His face was shadowed in stubble and his lips were slightly parted, Martin noticed, and again felt the rush of desperate love and desire. "Good morning Jack!" he said finally, and Jack began to strum absentmindedly as his eyes followed Martin's lean form moving to the table. "I brought bagels, hope you're hungry..." the cheerful voice chattered and died off. Martin began to work silently, taking plates from the cupboard and stacking the piles of domestic debris cluttering the table so as to make room for breakfast. Jack didn't mind eating on the floor, in the bathtub, on the roof, and sometimes became angry at Martin for his insistence on order. Usually he just tolerated it though, because, after all, it was Martin's apartment.

Martin could feel Jack's eyes in the silence and so

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he began to talk cheerfully again. "It's a beautiful day outside..." he hated this watching. He felt judged, scrutinized, he could never measure up. Only in the dark did he ever feel truly at ease with Jack, and even then he was always eager to please. Yet Jack's unwavering gaze followed him, making no move to leave, still sitting there, perfect in form, real. Touchable. Martin placed the plate down deliberately and turned to meet Jack's eyes. Alone with him at this distance he didn't know what to do with his hands, what to say, whether or not to smile. His eyes searched Jack's face longingly for an answer, but he only got the eyes, the slight smile of the lips, beckoning. Martin looked away and then back again. He cleared his throat and spoke "Now?" His face flushed with the husky quality of his voice, his foolishness, his questions. Jack only smiled in silence and moved toward him with surprising grace. Martin felt his knees buckle and together they fell to the floor.

When he awoke Jack had gone. He rose stiffly from the floor, cool now, and drew his clothes around him. Stale passion hung in the air - almost audible in his deserted silence. Martin felt a rare flash of anger "Why did I fall asleep? We could have talked, or eaten, or loved some more. Damn me, I don't deserve this. I can not help who I am." He remembered back to his first times with Jack; this had been new for him. "Relax" Jack had whispered, running his strong square hands, music hands, down Martin's bare arm. He had shivered, unable to meet Jack's eyes, unable to resist the pull. "You're so defensive" Jack chided softly, his eyes limpid in the shadows. He hadn't spoken back, any power to defend was gone. He had felt



like putty, being sculpted carefully. Molded. "Why me?" he had thought, "how could he see through me?" He had cried.

And now he moved about the apartment, still wet from his shower, smelling of Ivory, spicy pine, loneliness. This is how it had always been, before Jack. But then he hadn't minded so much, then he hadn't known what else there was. Now Jack spent most of his nights in Martin's apartment, and when he was gone Martin felt his true aloneness in a sense of despair he had never even imagined before. Jack would sit on the brown couch with a glass of red wine and talk about music, or films, or life. Martin was quiet at these times, but he hung on to every word. Jack would drink more, and talk more, and become depressed, and then angry as the night wore on. He would sit there with the neon shadows from the bar across the street separating his face into creased lines of sorrow. He would inhale his joint and then expel a thick stream of heavy smoke that hung in the air between him and Martin. He would offer Martin the joint, smiling a little with raised eyebrows, testing. Martin would shake his head, thankful for the darkness that hid his uncontrollable blush, feeling like a child under questioning. Nothing he could say would make a difference, he was caught being bad and that was that. Better to remain silent and hope for mercy. Hope that Jack wouldn't look close enough to see.

And yet, Jack had come along and opened him up, as if he were a present that had gone unnoticed for years, until someone saw that there was something of value inside. Jack would talk of his parents - both had disowned him years ago. His eyes would be red and he would laugh bitterly as he remembered his childhood, his battles, all of



his losses - always he spoke of his losses. He would talk of other men he'd known, and Martin's pulse would quicken, his heart aching with fear. He would talk of music, mostly his music, and how hard it was to get anywhere if you weren't the ass-licking son of a producer or manager. "I'm sick of this shit," he said angrily one night, "I'm working my fuckin' ass off to play shitholes for close to nothing. When am I ever gonna get anywhere? When do I stop dreaming and start living? When is there ever gonna be something real to hold on to?" Martin had no answers to give but a small sigh that came out like a strangled groan.

Later that night Jack had thrown his wineglass across the room with a cry of utter hatred at the world, at everything. It had hit the mirror and shattered into a million pieces, leaving two long cracks down the center of the mirror, soaking the beige rug with blood-red stains. There was a shocked silence and then Jack said "Fuck," his voice surprised out of fury, the syllable hanging in the air as if it were an explanation. Martin bent down silently and began to pick up the glass, careful not to kneel in it. "Fuck!" Jack said again, and then burst into laughter, his shaking image looking back at him across the room through the jagged lines of the cracked mirror.

"I am tired of dying every day," he had told Martin once. "I am tired of sinking. There's nothing left, nothing left to believe in."

"What about me?" Martin had whispered. Why can't I fill him up, the way he does me? he thought. Why aren't I enough?

Jack had just sighed and lit a cigarette. "Thanks for letting me stay here, man. I don't know where else I'd go." He needs me, Martin had thought, and felt a glow of

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purpose. He won't leave now.

And yet as Martin moved about the apartment now, alone with his thoughts, his memories, his passions, he realized he wasn't really alone, and never would be. Sitting on the couch where Jack often sat, he closed his eyes and smiled at the wonder of love, at the knowledge of being part of a whole. Martin felt his entire body smile, like a cat stretched out in the sun, and he knew that when Jack returned, he would be ready. Still smiling, he opened his eyes and studied the guitar lying in front of him. Although he knew he was alone, Martin looked about nervously before picking it up. He did so, tentatively, and listened to the sound he offered the empty room. For a few minutes he played notes and chords, and then smiled suddenly with embarrassment. He couldn't play, what was he doing? Jack was the one who made songs.

Yet he held the silent guitar to his body for a moment longer, letting his eyes take in the reflection of himself in his broken mirror across the room. He looked out of place with an instrument, yet he liked this image - the solitary musician. He stayed like that for a few minutes, but it was hard to see his reflection in the cracked mirror, he had to squint or else it was just fragments staring back. Martin let his eyes shift to the window, where it was much easier to see clearly. Laying the guitar down gently, he rose and walked over to where he could see the street below, waiting for Jack's return.

*Dave Callum*

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## Boxes of Triumph

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Distant is not a  
word for how things  
were - emotional  
gaps cannot be  
measured  
like footsteps  
on snowslopes, or  
riverbanks  
Trails in  
don't necessarily provide  
for adequate trails out and  
I sit on the ground and  
know that  
nothing  
can reach from  
behind if its  
hoofbeats  
can be felt scrambling up.  
Boxes of triumph dam  
the confluence of souls,  
and chairs numb  
the conception of  
warning.  
Ash falls on my  
head  
and the sky  
is brewing with  
revolution  
and I know that

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fear  
is  
value,  
and that suppression is merely  
a prolongment  
of the unpleasantries  
of disbelief.

*Dan Smulian*









